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INTRODUCTION

WITH a tradition spanning two millennia, Indian painting is as remarkable for its continuity as for the variety of its styles. The series of National Programme talks broadcast from All India Radio during September-October 1965, and brought together here, throws light on the different aspects and phases of the long evolution of Indian Painting.

The compilation does not claim to be comprehensive ; it attempts to cover, with lucidity combined with expertise, the great epochs and the major distinctive styles of Indian painting.

In the opening talk, Dr. O. C. Gangoly makes a fascinating collation of data from artefacts and the earliest literary strata to reconstruct the beginnings of the tradition. In the study of Ajanta and Bagh, the first great efflorescence, Sri Asok Mitra has an original contribution to make regarding the treatment of perspective. In the cultural sphere, India has given bountiful gifts to the world and assimilated as readily intimations from abroad. Dr. Moti Chandra studies the Indianisation of the Persian miniature under the Mughals. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray traces the perfect blending of Western Indian and Persian miniature traditions in Rajput art, while Dr. Randhawa deals with the freshness and lyricism acquired by this art when transferred to the picturesque valleys of the Himalayan piedmont. And lastly, Sri Sanyal surveys the contemporary scene when the Indian painter confronts myriad challenges represented by the dissolution of tradition and the accelerated coming together of cultural and stylistic impulses from all over the world.

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THE GLORIOUS BEGINNING

O. C. GANGOLY

IT is well known that a new and brilliant horizon has been presented to the history of Indian painting by the epoch-making discovery of the records of the Indus Valley culture at Mohenjo-Daro, at Chanchu-Daro and at Harappa and other related centres in the Indus Valley in Sind, with analogous painted pottery at a place called Nal in Baluchistan, just across the Indian border. The enormous quantity of painted pottery, mostly in fragments, which has been dug up at these pre-historic sites, datable between 3,000 and 2,250 years B.C., provides astonishing data and materials for the study of pictorial art. These reveal a developed phase of an art of wonderful aesthetic merit, distinguished by highly imaginative and naturalistic quality and marvellous power of design and of invention.

Painting of this epoch was merely the decoration of pots and pans, a mass production of folk art, which cannot be treated on the same level as the aristocratic style of the steatite seals with remarkable effigies of bulls and other animal types.

The pictures, drawn in swift slapdash black lines, show a mixture of geometrical motifs, criss-cross lines, scales, chess-board patterns, rows of dotted circles, or of intersecting circles with almost naturalistic representations of leaves, trees, birds, sometimes peacocks, occasionally also deer, goats, jackals, and sometimes lions. An American scholar has critically studied the designs and patterns of these painted wares and has classified them according to their component designs. His classification includes straight line borders, loop patterns, conventionalised patterns of human forms, and wavy lines of river pattern. Some of these "river pat-

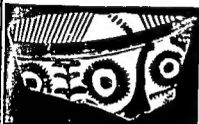
terns" have been related to a wonderful graphic delineation of a river scene found on an elamite seal from Mesopotamia.

But of the Indus Valley pottery, the most interesting items are plant designs which include leaves of the *ficus indica*,—the traditional *Vata-Vriksha* or banyan tree. Of animal designs, a variety of masterly representations appear of deer and ibex, in singles and in groups. A fragment depicts a lively representation of a bull, with a staring eye of mysterious beauty. A bowl carries a couple of lively fish of remarkable beauty and of astonishing realism. Though mostly in fragments, we are left to admire the powers of observation and remarkable draughtsmanship of the master artists of the Indus Valley.

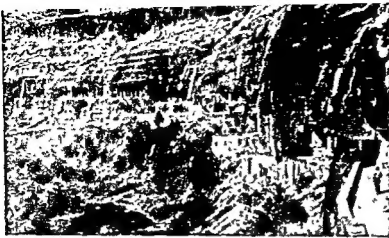
After the termination of the Indus Valley art we come across another new beginning in Vedic culture unrelated to the Indus Valley art. It has been recently established that pictorial art was freely practised during the Vedic Age. The most significant literary evidence is provided by a passage in the first Mandala of the Rigveda. It is an invocation to the fire god Agni whose fierce and quivering motions terrify the worshipper, who was anxious to worship him in a quiet motionless picture. "This god, Child of the Waters, was fierce like a beast roaming at large, devouring the forest. He has been quieted down and made still and motionless by placing him on a piece of skin." This is a poetic circumlocution for saying: "I am painting a still portrait of the god on a piece of parchment."

Now in Persian and Mughal schools of painting, we have several drawings executed on parchments. This medieval practice is the continuation of the old Vedic tradition.

Apart from literary evidences on the practice of painting in the Vedic Age, a startling discovery has been made recently in a rare old Japanese manuscript. This manuscript, apparently based on the Indian tradition, has revealed a series of portraits of Vedic sages with identifying inscriptions. Thus we have the portraits of the Vedic Rishi Vasishtha, Rishi Angirasa with his wife, and a portrait of Maharishi Atreya seated with his wife. There are two portraits of Vasishtha, one in a sitting posture and another in a walking pose. This proves that the Vedic artist was in the



Mohenjo-Daro : Painted pottery



General view
of Ajanta



Scenes from Mahajangka Jataka.
Cave No 1 Ajanta

Palace scene, Cave No. 2,
Ajanta, 5th century A.D.



Bodhisattva Padmapani
Ajanta, Cave No 1





Flying musicians, Ajanta, Cave No. 17

habit of making life-sketches of the sages in various postures and attitudes. The tradition of Vedic painting has been corroborated by two significant pictures painted on a manuscript of a Jaina *Kalpasutra*, one representing sunrise called "Sri Suryodaya" and another miniature depicting a mountain on fire. Dr. Coomaraswamy was emphatic in accepting these two miniatures as essentially Vedic in formulation.

If we have no survival of Vedic painting in the Gupta age we have a very lively representation of Indra killing the demon Vritra, depicted on a Gupta relief. It must have been a translation in stone from a pictorial representation.

Our third beginning of pictorial art was inspired by Buddhist culture illustrating the doctrine of Ahimsa (non-violence) preached by Gautama Buddha.

We all know of the series of brilliant frescoes on the walls of the Ajanta caves, executed between the first century B.C. and the beginning of the 7th century A.D. But Buddhist painting actually began during the life-time of the Buddha himself in the 6th century B.C. The first portrait of the Buddha was painted by a court artist of King Bimbisara of Magadha as vividly narrated in *Divyavadana*, an early Buddhist text. It is recorded that Rudrayana, the Prince of Roruka near Sind, had sent to King Bimbisara some valuable presents. Bimbisara sought the advice of the Buddha for a return gift. The Buddha suggested that his portrait painted on canvas should be sent. The king sent for his court-painter and commanded him to paint the portrait of the Buddha, the Amitabha, God of immeasurable radiance. Now the court artist, dazzled by the rays radiating from his body, was unable to do the outline of the portrait. Then the Buddha cast his shadow on the wall, from which the artist took the outline of the portrait. The Buddha directed the artist to fill it with appropriate colours. When the portrait was completed, the Buddha inscribed on the portrait some verses embodying the essentials of his doctrine. The portrait was then sent to the Prince of Roruka who exhibited it with a grand opening ceremony. When the practice of decorating and painting the Buddhist monasteries was started, the Buddha gave specific directions as to what subjects

should be depicted on the walls and what subjects should be prohibited.

By this time four distinct classifications of pictorial art were recognised, namely, Satya or Sattvika (pictures of grave spiritual import); Vainika (lyrical pictures); Nagara (urban and secular pictures) and Misra (pictures of mixed themes). The ultimate meaning of Nagara painting is erotic, having to do with love, pleasures and enjoyment.

The Buddha had prohibited the monks and nuns from visiting the royal gallery of Bimbisara which exhibited secular and erotic paintings which were unsuitable for the Bhiksus trained in monastic discipline and renunciation of all kinds of sensual pleasures. The caves of the Buddhist monasteries were, therefore, decorated with frescoes of Sattvika or grave religious import as in the caves of Ajanta and Bagh. The walls of the Ajanta caves vibrate with the richly colourful and edifying frescoes depicting the life of the Buddha which illustrates the various *Paramitas* or spiritual perfections. To look at these frescoes is to taste elevating spiritual emotions unknown in any other phase of Indian painting.





Bagh Caves Nos 4 and 5 Dance
1st half (above) and 2nd half (above right)
c 5th century A D

(Right) Bagh Cave No 4 Bodhisattvas

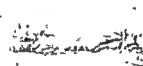




Illustrated folios, Pa's Style, 10th 11th centuries A.D.



The sage Manik watching two oxen being taken away by a camel, Akbar period, c.1585 A.D.



Illustrated page from manuscript of Kalpasutta, 15th century





the well 1st quarter of the 18th century



Cloth painting of the Hamza Nama,
late 16th century

Raga Basant, Jodhpur School
early 17th century



Falcon by Ustad Mansur
School of Jahangir c.1610-1620 AD



The angry heroine Malva Style
mid 17th century

pective which he carried to the highest point of refinement impelled by his own sagacity and inner need. This need was twofold. It was the urge to paint the sacred and the secular, even the profane, at one and the same time. It was the need to paint appearance and reality at once, appearance informed by reality, reality shot through with appearance.

The Ajanta artist was impelled by the need to move away from the perspective and compositional canons of the purely sacred art of Sanchi and Bharhut, for the latter would not permit any dilution in the pictorial translation of the spiritual idea, of no 'false note'.

Events in Sanchi and Bharhut no longer take place on earth or in the sky, but in the abstraction of an ideal universe. This philosophical tenet established a purely moral hierarchy replacing the material order of things. Modelling approached calligraphy. As the sense of volume disappeared, the old mode of perspective reappeared: composition in superimposed layers or rows, to which was added the composition of the medallion or a radiating composition in which all the elements are arranged round a centre.

The Ajanta artist was not willing to forget what he had learnt from Greek art. He had need for it too, for the obvious purpose of the murals in Ajanta and Bagh was to prepare the novitiate through a reappraisal of appearance by means of the Jataka stories which were midway between appearance and reality. He therefore needed to reflect earthly things, to see and show things from the corporeal point of view, which demanded that he gave all his creations the sharp edges and the clarity of geometrical forms. Thus his concern was also the definition of objects and concepts in their earthly dimensions and limits. This explains how his calligraphy came to be transformed into fully modelled plastic creations, as exactly circumscribed as solids in the three dimensions of space.

The same twofold need again impelled the Ajanta artist to choose what has been called rotation perspective based on the multiple vision. This technique enabled the artist to view and depict the same scene from different perspective points. The

multiplicity of perspective points in the same picture lends it an astonishing mobility and eliminates from it all static inertness usually associated with the law of frontalism. The viewer is placed right in the picture and moves around at will, being invited to see it from one vantage point after another as the picture unfolds itself. He becomes part of the picture itself.

One* could illustrate this technique from the two pavilions depicted side by side in the inner reaches of Cave 1 in Ajanta. In one we witness the investiture of Prince Maha Janaka in his palace and in the other his meditation in a Buddhist monastery.

At first sight one would think they were based on true optical perspective. If one extended the receding lines of the two pavilions indefinitely toward the line of the horizon, one would find them forming into two groups of diagonals or vanishing traces as they are called, moving away from each other to merge into two different vanishing points. This leads to the conclusion that the spectator's place is far from being fixed at the mouth of the alleyway between the two pavilions. Rather, he is some way right inside the passage and what is more, taking turns to have a good look at the pavilion on the left and then on the one at the right. At each turn he is securing a perspective that is empirically true. At the same time, the diagonals on the sides will be more sharply defined, with the result that the pavilions will gain in depth and look truly palatial in their proportions.

But although here as in many other cases the law of mathematical perspective has been seemingly obeyed, yet they give rise to curious anomalies. For example, the way the facades of the pavilions have been drawn, one would imagine the spectator was right in front and placed in dead centre. But at the same time the spectator is enabled to see the pavilions from their side, the sides that recede backwards, which could only happen if the spectator were viewing each pavilion from one of its corners or even its side. This optical anomaly occurred on account of the fact that the artist was not painting pavilions from real life.

*I am indebted to Mr. J. Auboyer for the analysis in this and the next paragraph. See her 'Composition and Perspective at Ajanta', *Art and Letters, India and Pakistan*, New Series, Vol. 22, No. 1, London, 1948.

He saw all of the pavilions in his mind's eye and presented all the details that he wished to.

It would be wrong to confuse this with what is usually labelled by art historians as primitive vision. The Ajanta artist was much too educated, experienced and widely travelled for that. The fact is that he deliberately chose it to suit his twofold need.

Considered in this light, one will readily concede that the Ajanta artist of the Gupta period attained great heights and made the most of his pictorial heritage. This applies equally to his mastery of the problems of pictorial composition.

Beginning with the abstract, schematic compositions without ground line or horizon, he displayed great mastery over the simple, balanced or regular composition, where the main central mass is supported by two masses on either side.

In the next place he revolutionised the primitive radiating composition, which in India took the form of the medallion. One is at once reminded of the Amaravati medallion depicting the gods bearing Buddha's bowl to heaven. The problem for the sculptor here was how to guide the viewer's eye gently upwards toward the bowl. To that end the masses in low relief are so skilfully arranged, the lines around them are so firmly and gracefully ordered that they unerringly propel the viewer's eye toward the bowl.

One is reminded of a very fine late example in the Rasa Mandala painting in the Jaipur Palace Museum. The artists of Ajanta and Bagh went a step further. They frequently set up two circular compositions at two levels diagonally to each other and connected them by guiding the eye from the one to the other, with the help of architectural devices like columns or balustrades or human figures. This kind of connecting link composition is eminently suited to unfolding one story after another without pause while communicating the passage of time.

Both Ajanta and Bagh abound in this type of composition. Let us take the investiture of Maha Janaka in Ajanta Cave 1 again. It has two parts composed of two distinct circular groups, one around the prince and princess in a roofed porch, the other around the group of musicians in the open. In each group the

spectator's eye is gently guided toward its centre by the contours of the figures, the posture of the heads, the curve of the arms. Two figures help the viewer's eye to travel from one circle to the other. One of them is a woman standing between two columns. Although she falls within the prince's group, her body is clearly turned toward the musicians' group. The second is a doubled-up figure lying at the first figure's feet. Like the first this second figure is clearly included in the prince's circle, yet it is firmly connected to the latter by having its head turned toward the second group. There is still another connecting link, not quite so obvious, which is the rhythm of the two dancers' bodies in the first group. Their undulations seem to form the ends of two imaginary diagonals which, starting from the right leg of the princess, travel along the arm of the crouching figure on to the flutes of the musicians of the second group.

This pattern is closely repeated in the famous Hallisaka fresco at Bagh. In its essence it can be reduced to a diagonally placed ellipse containing two circles within its two ends. Within each circle of the ellipse again the artist introduces appropriate movement and tension by establishing more than one perspective point, and involves the viewer wholly by planting him right in the middle of the composition itself. The ellipse in its turn is connected by means of obvious links with another similarly executed ellipse making it possible for one story to succeed another.

Ajanta and Bagh are both preoccupied with narrating stories. They do not possess a single compelling rhythm that holds all things together in one great, comprehensive, pictorial unity such as one finds in the Sistine Chapel. But their aims were different and they achieved a different kind of excellence. Firstly, they achieved marvellous abundance with a marvellous economy. In the next place, they attained an astonishingly wide chromatic range with the help of a very few essential pigments. Then again, Indian painting has rarely displayed such skill in perspective, such mastery over the plastic form, such excellence in modelling mainly with the help of tonality and delicate shading. Alongside this must be mentioned the excellence of drawing, of decoration, of calligraphy, the skilful juxtaposition of masses of colour, all of

which added up to true design. It is quite plain that the Ajanta artist was well aware of what had been achieved in the domain of mural painting in many parts of the world. He knew for instance what had been done in other parts of India, in Persia, Mesopotamia, China, Egypt and Greece.

His stupendous grounding in low relief sculpture gave the Ajanta artist natural mastery over the monumental form and very complete knowledge of the play of light on rough surfaces. Finally, on top of it all there was the overriding zest for life in all its aspects, the inexhaustible sense of wonder, oneness with the universe, attention to the minutest realistic detail even when working within severely formal, stylized, iconographic canons, that made the artist pack all appearance, all creation in the full glory of its form, beauty, wonder, intensity, excitement and passion on the walls of fearful, desolate caves.

Did he do this, one wonders, to help renunciation and meditation, or to distract and wean away, by strangely jostling the sacred and the secular? Or was it his own way of bringing about a marriage between the spiritual idea and the earthly reality, a marriage, in short, of heaven and earth?



MUGHAL PAINTING

MOTI CHANDRA

THE sixteenth century is an exciting period in Indian history. The old order was disintegrating fast and the new order has not yet been established by the conquering Mughals. It is, however, significant that though the Sultans spent most of their time in internecine wars, architecture, music and literature flourished and some of the provincial courts like Jaunpur, Ahmedabad and Mandu became important centres of Islamic culture.

There is, however, not sufficient evidence to prove that the Sultans made any conscious effort to improve the state of painting, though material is gradually turning up to support the view that in the first half of the sixteenth century, efforts were being made to evolve a new style which, though maintaining certain features of the Western Indian school, eliminated some of its characteristic features such as the extension of the farther eye. By toning down the angularity of the draughtsmanship, and by eliminating the indiscriminate use of ultramarine and gold, the emerging style laid stress on a new mode of expression. This new style also did not fight shy of accepting certain foreign elements which it Indianised.

From the available material it is evident that it had both a classical and a folk phase. The classical phase represented by the *Nimat Nama* and *Laur-Chanda* series reveals an advanced technique with careful draughtsmanship, a sober colour scheme and a pleasing approach to landscape and architecture. However, the problem of grouping the figures in a convincing manner had not been solved even in the vertical composition. In the folk phase a persistent effort to blend the Persian and Indian

types is seen. The new school did not confine itself to illustrating Jain books only, but extended its scope to texts like the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Gita Govinda*, the Avadhi romances and also some Persian classics.

In 1526, however, an event of far reaching importance occurred in Indian history. Babur, who was a descendant of Chenghiz Khan and Timur, defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the battle of Panipat. Mughal India had begun on that date. Battles followed and by 1530 Babur was in a position to establish an extensive empire.

Babur was a man of literary taste and an aesthete who admired the beauties of nature, music, painting and architecture. The dust and heat of Indian plains, however, did not please him and he longed for the land from which he had come. But incessant campaigns left him little time to foster art and architecture in the land he had conquered.

Humayun who succeeded Babur after his victory in Gujarat settled comfortably at Agra and spent his time in composing mystical verses, listening to music and enjoying life. But his indolent existence was rudely disturbed by Sher Shah, whose victories forced him to flee to Persia to seek help from Shah Tahmasp Safavi to regain his lost empire.

Humayun was impressed by the achievements of the Safavi painters and invited at least one of them to join his entourage. With Safavi support Humayun took up residence at Kabul and waited for the opportunity for reconquest. Prince Akbar joined him there and the painters Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad arrived from Persia in 1549. The stage was now set for the beginning of Mughal painting though, in the rare examples that have survived, there is hardly any feature which distinguishes the style from contemporary Persian painting. However, Akbar's close association with the two Persian masters proved fruitful for the future development of Mughal painting.

In 1553 Humayun got the opportunity to regain his lost throne as the weak successors of Sher Shah, who died in 1545, were unable to hold his kingdom. The Mughals were back in Agra in 1555, but the unlucky Humayun was unable to enjoy the fruits

of his victory; for, shortly after, he slipped from the library staircase and died.

After the death of Humayun the reins of the Government passed into the hands of Akbar who by his bravery, strength of character, reformer's zeal, spirit of religious tolerance, wise administration and love for art and literature, became one of the greatest rulers India had ever seen. Akbar's court was a truly cosmopolitan one in which poets, philosophers, divines, artists, musicians and merchants received due recognition. He stocked his library not only with Persian classics but ordered Indian classics to be translated into Persian.

Akbar in his boyhood had learnt to enjoy the linear grace and brilliant colours of Persian painting. But he was apparently not satisfied by its formalism. When he founded the atelier of painters he saw to it that the newly founded Mughal School reflected his dynamic personality. In brief, Akbar did not consider the formal decorative style of Persian art well suited to the genius of Indian artists.

To give fullest expression to his views on painting, Akbar ordered in 1567 the illustration of the *Hamza Nama* which described the adventures of Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet, in twelve volumes from which about two hundred illustrations have survived. According to the contemporary accounts, the compositions in the *Hamza* volumes were drawn by Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad, but fifty or more painters employed in the atelier painted them.

The illustrations of the *Hamza* show a dramatic treatment of the events, broad handling, deep expressive colours and love for landscape and architecture. Naturally, the influence of Persian styles from Bukhara, Mashhed and Shiraz is obvious; but the builders of the Mughal school did not fight shy of introducing in their style elements from Kashmir and Nepal as well. The illustrated pages of the *Tuti Nama* painted in 1566 or thereabouts, now in the Cleveland Museum, throw fresh light on the assimilative spirit of the Mughal School. The style shows that the artists worked more or less in Indianised variants of Persian and other Islamic styles. They were also at home with the new style



An Apsara, from a wall painting,
Ajanta Caves 5th century AD



Prince and princess in conversation, wall painting, Ajanta Caves c 5th century

Jehangir's darbar. Mughal School, 17th century





Spring Kangra School 18th century

of the Sultanate period developed in the first half of the sixteenth century.

It is not possible here to trace the development of the early Mughal School, but it is obvious that within a short span of twenty-five years, the Mughal artists made a conscious effort at the refinement of the miniature technique. Akbar personally supervised their work and improvement in their technique was recognised by awards and promotions. An illustrated copy of the *Diwan* of Anwari dated 1588 shows that the pocket-size volume was written on the finest paper and many of its pages are marbled or decorated with animals, birds and flowers in golden arabesque. The individual styles of the Akbar period became more pronounced with the advancement of time and Farrukh Beg and the Hindu artists, Daswant and Basawan, to mention only a few names, became great stylists of the age.

Akbar also commissioned books on history several of which have survived. Some illustrated copies of the autobiography of Babur throw important light on his personality and the *Tarikh-i-Khandan-e-Taimuriya* deals with Mughal history. But the most vivid of the histories is the *Akbar Nama* or History of Akbar in the South Kensington Museum. Following the usual Mughal practice, most of the miniatures are by several artists, specialists in their own branches. But in spite of this procedure, the paintings of the *Akbar Nama* are noted for the unity of design and they are full of excitement wherever dramatic incidents in the life of the Emperor are painted.

Akbar's sympathetic understanding of Hinduism is well known. In order to understand Indian culture he ordered the Persian translation of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Harivamsa* and got them profusely illustrated. These miniatures not only glorify the epics but also form a veritable treasure-house of contemporary Hindu manners and customs.

Abul Fazl, the historian, also informs us that Akbar commissioned an immense portrait album, "whereby those who have passed away received new life and those who are still alive have immortality." Making full allowance to courtly exaggerations,

the art of portrait painting inspired by Akbar's love for people reached a high degree of excellence.

So far as the history of Mughal painting is concerned, Jehangir was a worthy successor of Akbar. He allowed the wise policies of his father to continue, and this gave him ample time for aesthetic pursuits. His memoirs throw light on his picturesque personality and his appraisal of men and events. He loved birds and animals and the beauties of nature stirred him deeply. Like his father he was devoted to the arts, and painting was one of the major concerns of his life.

Prior to his accession, as Prince Salim, he had employed many painters who remained with him when he inherited his father's atelier. It is evident from the available examples that Jehangir favoured naturalism in art, though it must be admitted that the school of Jehangir did not lend itself to an all encompassing style. Incidents from court life were painted, though a certain stiffness of treatment shows that the formalism of court life was uppermost in the mind of the painters. Birds and animals which attracted the emperor by their rarity and colourfulness were painted by his order and Ustad Mansur became a renowned bird and animal painter of the age.

An outstanding feature of the painting of this period is superb border decoration which is usually an arabesque with hunting scenes, birds and animals, picnic parties, music and dancing and people engaged in various professions. European art also attracted Jehangir. Certain elements such as the suggestion of perspective and naturalistic treatment of landscape in the paintings of this period show borrowing from contemporary European painting. Portrait painting was done from life. In the court scenes, however, the portraits of the grandees were apparently made from the tracings kept in the atelier.

In Jehangir's India, painting became more widely diffused. Many Mughal grandees, the Rajput nobles and to some extent even merchants employed painters trained in the Mughal atelier. Though their work was not of a very high order, they laid the foundations of a new category of painting which is known as

Popular Mughal in which, though the technique was basically Mughal, Rajasthani elements were freely introduced.

The age of Shah Jehan was the age of architects who raised elegant monuments in marble, of goldsmiths, lapidaries and needle workers. But in spite of all the glitter of the imperial court, decadence had already set in. Painting was tolerated by Shah Jehan though his increasing orthodoxy prevented him from taking as much interest in its development as his father.

The art of portraiture became progressively stiffer and in spite of the jewel-like colours and representation of minutest details, the vacant spaces around the portraits give them a sense of isolation which is depressing. Portraits of holy men singly or in groups appear in large number. History was also not forgotten. In the illustrations of the *Shah Jehan Nama*, court scenes, processions, hunting scenes, weddings and battle scenes appear. But in spite of the technical perfection, the school of Shah Jehan shows that the Mughal School had reached its zenith and its downfall was imminent.

Though intelligent and industrious, Aurangzeb by his religious bigotry brought about the ruin of the empire he loved so dearly. In the beginning of his reign he patronised painters, musicians and craftsmen, and was himself often painted. But after 1665 he seems to have closed down the atelier and also turned against musicians and poets.

The painters, bereft of court patronage, began producing mediocre paintings to cater to the market taste with the result that the accomplished court technique, leisurely conceived and developed, declined rapidly. The old emperor, however, was not in a position to deprive the princes and nobles of their simple pleasure, and they continued to patronise painting, though naturally on a much reduced scale. The art which they patronised does not reflect the grandeur of the court but seeks solace in weak portraits, harem scenes, drinking parties, pastimes and meaningless romanticism.

Politically speaking, the later Mughals did not matter much. In 1719 Muhammad Shah was elevated to the Mughal throne and though his faults are legion he deserves some respect as a lover

of music and painting. His sensual personality is seen in his representations in harem scenes, in the company of dancing girls and musicians, in gardens and other pleasure resorts. The portraits of the period are lifeless and mechanical, and the miniatures, though decorative, reveal all the characteristics of a decadent art.

In 1739 Nadir Shah, the Turkoman ruler of Persia, sacked and looted Delhi. After Nadir had gone back, Muhammad Shah found himself utterly helpless in reviving the glories of Delhi. The pomp and culture of Delhi had now shifted to the provincial capitals where art activities were carried on for some time, but the glorious tradition of the Mughal School was dead for ever.



turning upside down of the house that Coomaraswamy had built. For one thing, that great scholar found in Rajput painting a Hindu counterpart, essentially religious in theme, character and purpose, and indigenous in origin and tradition, of Islamic Mughal painting which was in his opinion basically secular and affiliated to a foreign tradition. For another, Coomaraswamy believed that Rajput painting was, chronologically speaking, earlier in origin, and though running a parallel course with the Mughal, it continued to stay more or less untouched by the latter, except toward the very end.

Today, however, we know that there is no single dated or datable painting of Rajasthani origin, that can be assigned to a date before the end of the sixteenth century at the earliest, when Mughal painting had already all but scored half-a-century of its existence. Secondly, thematically speaking, Rajasthani painting is neither more religious nor less secular than Mughal. Thirdly, it is no more or no less indigenous in origin than Mughal, no more or no less traditional too. Fourthly, Rajasthani painting could never resist—indeed it seems it never attempted to—the impact of Mughal painting. And fifthly, despite Mughal painting being more responsive to contemporary Iranian and West European forms, and hence more international in character, Rajasthani painting is no more or no less Indian in spirit and formal character than Mughal.

No longer is it necessary to explain the origins of the Mughal School by reference to an accidental contact of Humayun with the Safavid court painters of Iran, though the deep impact of contemporary Iranian painting on Mughal painting need not at all be ignored or denied. It is now increasingly becoming clear that Mughal painting was the resultant effect in the hands of a highly cultured and sophisticated imperial dynasty and their court, of a close cultural communication that had been going on for centuries between India and those areas of Central Asia that now constitute the Eastern republics of the USSR, Iran serving obviously as one of the most important transmitting stations functioning actively and creatively. Indian Sultanate painting, which preceded the Mughal School, was a more or less direct product



Hunting the wild boar, Bundi Style, late 18th century

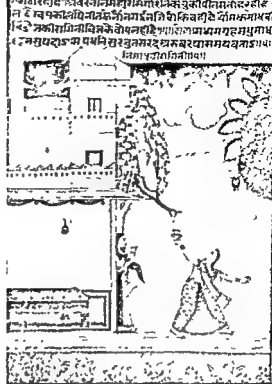


Radha's toilet, Kangra School,
18th century



Radha and Krishna,
Kangra, 18th century

Ragini Madhu Madhavi,
Rajasthan, mid 18th century



Frustrated in love,
Kangra, 18th century



Radha, Kangra School,
18th century

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of this large-scale inter-Asian commerce in ideas, forms and fashions, and inevitably made its own part contribution to the origin and evolution of Mughal court and bazar painting, at its early stages at any rate.

So it did to the Rajasthani as well which had imbibed some of the forms and fashions of earlier West Indian, mainly Gujarati, manuscript illustrations. And since Rajasthani painting ran a parallel course with the more free, less inhibited and more powerful Mughal, and since there was some amount of social mobility in the community of artists, the former could not escape the heavy and overall pressure of the latter, at least from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards. This escape was not possible indeed during those centuries when the Mughal imperial court set the pattern of tastes and fashions, prides and preferences, of the big and small feudal courts as well as of the commercial bourgeoisie, irrespective of whether they were Hindu or Muslim.

Rajasthani painting is thus the complex but creative end-product of a continuous trade and cultural movement, in a large segment of Asia, in which, roughly from about the twelfth to about the seventeenth century, the West Indian, the Indian Sultanate and the Mughal, each contributed the water of its stream. This international movement, be it noted, did not take into account the respective religions of the lands and peoples that came to be touched and affected by it.

The art forms, their styles and idioms etc., were the products of the international cultural commerce I have been referring to, and it was these forms and fashions, styles and idioms that came to serve as receptacles of the myths, symbols, images and themes of the respective peoples and places wherein they found themselves. In the process of acclimatisation these forms came inevitably to be conditioned and transformed in their turn as much by indigenous and traditional forms as by the ideas, images, tastes and preferences obtaining among those who came to employ them.

If what was made available by history to the artists and their patrons of late medieval Rajasthan was important, no less important was the contemporary creative collective psyche of the

people of which they were but part. We must therefore take note of the nature and character of this collective psychic.

Rajasthan throughout the long medieval centuries was a land of feudal chivalry, destined, historically speaking, to uphold the glory and prestige of traditional Hindu culture and civilisation against the impact of a new and more vigorous religion, Islam, and its culture. It fostered a life of heroism and courage in the battle-field and sacrifice and suffering at home, a life fed by bardic tales and epic cycles that idealised these aspects of human character.

Almost as an offset, as it were, to this stern and stoic life, they craved for and found solace in a religion of intense devotion to a personal deity—Rama or Krishna—in a kind of idealised love that was not theirs in actual life, the symbolic love and exploits of Krishna and Radha in countless number of moods and situations; in romances centring round the traditional classification of idealised heroes and heroines (*Nayakas* and *Nayikas*) in mutual fascinations, attachments, separations and reunions, a kind of romance that the people had very little experience of; and in the equally romantic and sentimental seasonal songs (*Baramasa*) and songs relating to musical modes (*Ragamala*) which aimed at the evocation of specific moods and situations in men and women in the grip of love, desire and nostalgia.

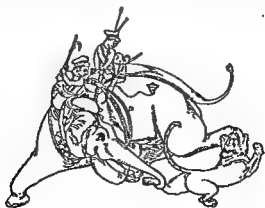
These were indeed the dominating themes as much of medieval Rajasthani literature as of Rajasthani painting—a picture of life full of colour, of love and romance, of sentiment and passion, of music and poetry and of intense devotion to a personal deity, in which was sought to be cooled the tension of hard toil and heroism, of suffering and sacrifice, of insecurity and uncertainty of the actual Rajasthani life of those centuries.

The rest of the story is easily told. In its earliest phase, datable to the last decade of the sixteenth and the first two decades of the seventeenth century and emanating mainly from Mewar, it seems, Rajasthani painting was a regional adaptation of West Indian manuscript painting of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These early paintings are extremely simple and straightforward in composition in which figures almost in silhouette are

rather to emphasise their formal quality than to explain the meaning of the stories presented.

In any given composition sharp lines and angles predominate on a pointed surface which is flat and keeps relatively to the second dimension. Modelling of volumes is kept to the minimum; indeed it is not attempted at all and hence there is no tonality of colour. Glowing colours in deep harmonious contrast are held firmly within the outlines of their bodies set against solid backgrounds of red or blue or any other dark colour. Architectural settings and sartorial shapes and forms reflect contemporary forms and fashions as stylised and interpreted by the artists of the age.

The eighteenth century brought into the Rajasthani School the practice of portraiture, evidently the result of the strong impact that Mughal court artists must have been making in the Indian art world. Indeed, during the first half of the eighteenth century the influence of the Mughal School was overpowering; at Jaipur and Jodhpur, for instance, sieges and battles, etc., were slowly but surely introduced, and there is increasing Mughalisation even of *Ragamala* paintings and of architectural settings. But though the transformation was never so complete as to suggest that the paintings were the work of Mughal artists, nevertheless one cannot but feel that Rajasthani painting had already started losing its identity and uniqueness.



It was the creed of Vaishnavism which inspired the Sanskrit and Hindi poets of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries and ultimately it was their poetry which inspired the artists of the Punjab Hills and Rajasthan.

The eleventh century witnessed the rise of Vaishnavism which was a doctrine of passionate personal devotion toward an incarnate deity in the form of Krishna. Jayadeva, the author of the Sanskrit poem, *Gita Govinda*, was the court poet of Lakshmana Sen, King of Bengal (1179—1205). His poem is an allegory of the souls striving to escape the allurements of the senses to find peace in mystical union with God. In the fifteenth century, Bihar and Bengal in eastern India became the home of the Radha-Krishna cult. Vidyapati and Chandi Das were the poets of the new creed, and in their poems sensuous emotions are sublimated into spiritual delight and pleasures of the senses find an outlet in mystic ecstasy. Chaitanya (1486—1533) lays stress on our capacity for realising God as a lover, the soul of man being His bride. Chaitanya realised that emotions were the great motor-power of the soul which, refined and sublimated, could lift man to a higher plane of beatitude. God is the bridegroom and the soul of man is the devoted bride. This bride is Radha of Vaishnava literature. The Radha-Krishna cult spread to North India and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries mystic poets like Sur Das, Keshav Das and Mira Bai wrote about the loves of Radha and Krishna. Their poems are rich in poetic flavour, subtlety of feeling and sensuous delight. In brevity of expression and vividness, they have the quality of miniature word-painting.

How did the art of painting reach the Kangra Valley? Mughal emperors from Akbar to Jehangir and later Bahadur Shah and Muhammad Shah, patronised the art of painting of the Mughal School. In 1739, India was invaded by the Persian marauder, Nadir Shah. Delhi was sacked and people dispersed in all directions in search of safety. Among the refugees who fled from Delhi were some Hindu artists trained in the Mughal style and they escaped to the hills of Punjab. Some of them reached Guler in the Punjab Hills where they got the patronage of Raja Dalip Singh (1695—1744) and later on of his son Govardhan

Chand. Govardhan Chand's son Prakash Chand continued the patronage of artists. Thus the Kangra School of Indian miniature painting, which is one of the most beautiful of all the schools of miniature painting, had its birth at Haripur Guler.

In 1786 Raja Sansar Chand occupied Kangra Fort, which was the symbol of power in the Kangra Valley. With the occupation of the fort, Sansar Chand became the most powerful ruler of the Punjab Hills and embarked on a career of conquest. But it is his patronage of miniature painting which is more important than his conquests. He attracted artists from Guler and gave them encouragement.

Inspired by his patronage the artists embarked upon ambitious projects of illustrating the Hindu classics, particularly those connected with the Krishna legend. They illustrated Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, the *Rasikapriya* of Keshav Das, the *Sat Sai* of Bihari, the *Bhagavata Purana*, and the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The cycle of seasons and the visualisation of musical modes also furnished themes.

It would be interesting to know some facts about the life of this king of the Kangra Hills who encouraged this school of painting, whose output is so enormous that there is no museum worth the name in India or elsewhere which does not have some of its specimens. Sansar Chand was of a romantic temperament, and apart from his three queens he also married a shepherdess, Nokhu by name, who was well known for her beauty. During the last days of his life he fell in love with a dancing girl whose name is given as Jamalo. He had been deprived of his conquests by Maharaja Ranjit Singh who became the ruler of Punjab. With ambition gone and glory faded, he found solace in the company of this dancing girl, and he lived with her in the palace at Nadaun overlooking the Beas river. The latter days of his life he spent in encouraging artists to paint pictures on the Krishna legend. He used to listen to stories from story-tellers and also to songs relating to the Krishna legend.

The Kangra School of miniature painting, with its rhythmic lines and glowing colours, is one of the finest achievements of the human spirit. There is delicacy and sensitiveness in the line com-

सुन्दरी



Abhisarika
(Abanindranath Tagore)



Dancing girl's worship (Nandalal Bose)



A painting (Rabindranath Tagore)





The Crucifixion (Jamini Roy)

Devsdasi (M F Husain)





Mother and child
(Shivax Chavda)



Folk dance
(K K Hebbar)

MODERN INDIAN PAINTING

B. C. SANYAL

IN the long past, the geographical position of the Indian sub-continent was naturally inducive to cultural isolation and insularity. This brought about a certain inbreeding of artistic idealism. But the gifted Indian people had at the same time cultivated the ability to accept and assimilate experiences other than indigenous in the sphere of visual and plastic arts. They allowed such fusion that did not compromise the artistic identity. Thus Indian art in general has been an expression of a way of life and a unique civilisation. In the long stretch of time, the practice of the arts built up a unity of Indian tradition—tradition of architecture, sculpture, dance, music and painting. The continuity of the tradition had, however, a setback centuries earlier than our times—certainly so in painting.

By the 18th century, India was in the melting pot politically, with diverse forces crossing swords and intriguing against one another for supremacy. The great Mughal empire already on its last legs conceded the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the English East India Company. Bengal was ravaged by famine and mis-rule of the Company and the Nawabs. The vacuum in Punjab politics paved the way for the rise of the Sikhs. Foreign adventurers—Portuguese, Dane and Dutch, French and English—were marking their time to strike for ultimate political power. The English indeed had entrenched themselves to take the best advantage of the situation and to launch their agonisingly long imperialist regime.

Art cannot flourish when life is unstable. In the foregoing state of instability, Indian painting followed a path of decline and finally degenerated into soulless imitative skill of artisans only.

The craft and techniques of fresco and miniature painting, unique in the history of art, were nearly lost. What still remained was degenerate copies of the old art form. At the beginning of the 19th century, a curious style of painting developed, manifesting craftsmanship of older times, but displaying a general deterioration of good taste. The style was currently under the influence of an inferior European school of painting that had made an ingress in the contemporary scene.

Folk traditions in art, however, were yet alive with some measure of vitality even under early British rule, but the lingering traits of Indian art gave in to new fashions brought by foreigners. Miniatures were ousted by European oil painting. Dumping of modern factory products from Europe steadily ruined and displaced the beautiful handicrafts. The process of disintegration worked on relentlessly throughout the 19th century and finally at the turn of the century traditional Indian painting faded out, completing its cycle of life.

In the vacuum thus created in the cultural conflict between the East and the West, European colonial art found its way in India. Europeans then living amidst the over-powering Indian population were obliged to identify externally with the habits and customs of the Indian people. They adopted partially the Indian way of life in dress, food, habits and in the choice of wives. This superficial identification gave rise to a curiously hybrid taste in the arts, architecture and domestic furnishing among the Indian upper middle class.

Ultimately, with the British conquest of the country, art and architectural styles of 19th-century Europe found easy access in the Indian scene and the prosperous section of Indian society came very much under the influence of Victorian concepts of living. Many a mansion was loaded with bad marble sculpture and third-rate European paintings of nudes, landscapes and hunting hounds.

The British, during their rule, founded art schools in the capitals of the principal provinces and taught none too good styles of painting of the Victorian era. The art schools were mainly required to produce painters and draughtsmen for the Railway and Survey Departments.

Quite a few talented Indians, however, became adepts in the current style of European painting and in the techniques of oil and water colour. Raja Ravi Varma of Kerala gained much reputation in the period, by his paintings of mythological subjects and portraiture. Patronage of painters of the then popular genre painting was confined to the landed aristocracy and wealthy merchants and to some extent to the bureaucrats of the ruling British. Mention must, however, be made here of the small group of enlightened Englishmen who came to learn and appreciate the aesthetic values of Indian art and save it from decay and oblivion. Best known among them are Cunningham, Fergusson, Cousins, Havell and Percy Brown.

Towards the end of the 19th century, a positive reaction commenced against the staleness of the degenerate school of painting and time was ripe for the rise of truly Indian painting. The pioneers looked back into the heritage for inspiration. Abanindranath, an associate of Havell, conscientiously tried to re-create a national art style in painting. He and his worthy pupils assiduously experimented in techniques of Indian miniature, frescoes, scroll and *pata* paintings as well as other Oriental styles of painting, like Persian, Japanese and Chinese. For subjects they delved into the Indian classics and mythology and the romantic past.

This new artistic faith spread far and wide in the country. The so called Bengal School of Painting, with centres in Calcutta and Santiniketan, wielded great influence on the art schools in the subcontinent. Naturally enough, the exponents of the School, charged with the newly awakened sense of nationalism, tried to copy and imitate old masterpieces of Indian art, aiming at revival. But no sooner the romantic renaissance phase came to an end than the School readily yielded to stronger modern inspirations, the movement fulfilling the aim of regaining the lost self-respect of the nation in the form of its cultural heritage.

Now came the time for a more critical approach to painting as a craft and painting as an art first and foremost. The emotional impact of the Bengal School settling down and the over-emphasis on the dead past withdrawn, there was room for intellectual manoeuvre and analysis of our experience and understanding. We

were actually on the threshold of the modern phase of Indian painting.

For the first time, we began to hear 'painterly painting'. It is almost impossible to explain what is understood by the term 'painterly', but it is safe to assume that it lays accent on the manner the pigment is handled and on the fact that colour by itself is an important element in modern painting, independent of subject matter, if any. The concepts of easel painting—with stress on narrative themes—ceased to interest the artists of this era. The altered social context must be understood first for an intelligent understanding of modern Indian painting.

It will be correct to say that modern art has made its impact with telling effect in a large way in the post-independence period. The reason is not far to seek. The historic event of attaining freedom after hundreds of years of foreign domination released a mighty force of suppressed creative energy in all directions and no less in the area of plastic and visual arts. The newly awakened Indian mind was not content to contain within the barriers of her frontiers. The temperament of the nation was attuned to internationalism. Indians travelled abroad more widely than ever before. Cultural exchange with friendly foreign countries became the order of the day.

A two-way traffic in the exchange brought painters face to face with modern international trends in the field of painting. The cultural isolation and insularity of the past began crumbling and young Indian painters of talent readily responded to the climate of the jet age and space flight. The gospel of democracy and socialism, preached by our leaders, left the painters free to choose and experiment.

Stale traditionalism was rejected in preference to progressivism. Modern Indian painting is a complete reversal and final break away from the past. It is largely an experience, unlike anything native to the soil.

What is modern painting? It is not easy to explain in words what belongs to shape, colour and form. Seeing is learning in the visual art and one must look at a work of art with eyes and head and heart. Like scientists, inventors and explorers of our time,



Story-teller
(Amrita Sher Gil)



Eclipse (Laxman Pat)

Head (Akbar Padamsee)

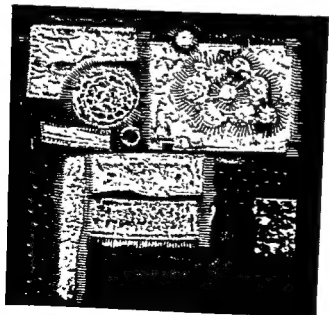


First Sin (J Sultan Ali)





Inheritance
(Shanti Dave)



Way to Infinity
(Paraj Sagara)

the great modern artists are pioneers of a new school of adventurous painting. Modern art reflects the complexity of modern life. We may well ask, however, how complex is modern Indian life as compared to life in the West. Life in the West, we must remember, has faced two devastating World Wars and other crucial problems of their civilisation ; the effects of advanced Capitalism, revolutionary Communism and barbaric Fascism ; the effects of industrialisation and technological developments ; the discoveries in the realm of the subconscious mind. We in India are just emerging from a state of medievalism. There is a substantial difference, therefore, in the complexity of modern life in the West and here. But the difference is in the degree of intensity. Modern Indian painters are city dwellers and not free from the complexities of modern life. Moreover, intellectually they accept the universality of modern art, as much as they share the experience of modern man.

Painting to-day is not confined to the traditional application of canvas, colour and brush, due to technological inventions of new media. In fact, it will soon be a misnomer to call a modern artist a painter. He is today something of a technician with a creative vision. Materials like plastics, leather, moulded glass, ceramics and stainless steel are extensively in use in architecture and domestic appliances and are within easy experience of familiarity with the Western artist. He is able to make sensitive use of such material for a creative collage, as a substitute to orthodox painting.

The same, however, in the Indian context appears forced and uninspiring, as the acquaintance and understanding of the Indian artist of the new material is nil. Here then is a question of sensibility and sincerity, which make or mar any creative work. Understandably, the Indian painter does not find his traditional art-forms adequate to express the inner tension of modern art. In his striving to find acceptable idiom to present his creation, which is contemporary in spirit, the less gifted among them borrow recognisable phrases from the international vocabulary rather than strike an ingenious note. This tendency takes away much from

the originality of modern Indian painting. With few exceptions, facile sophistry substitutes searching inventiveness.

Notwithstanding the uncertain popularity, modern painters are widening Indian awareness of modern art. In its wake, the movement has drawn a sizable coterie and, as they always do, the snobs also have come in. It has become chic and *avant-garde* to admire modern painting. One comes across at exhibitions dreamy young men and soulful women declaring: "Oh! the painter has a statement to make."

Modern painting in India has its own problems to be resolved. Aesthetically, it has to be weaned from overpowering foreign influence and helped to discover an identifiable, authentic style. There is the question of patronage. The scope of patronage being limited at home, the modern painter is obliged to seek recognition and clientele abroad. This has naturally brought a keen sense of competition and given an edge to the movement. Our artists have held their own successfully in foreign art centres. But it has also meant, perhaps unconsciously, catering to the taste of foreign patrons.

The modern movement has raised the standard of the much neglected graphic art in India. The medium is now well on its way to becoming a powerful means of artistic expression. Modern Indian painters are also exploring the possibilities of application of ceramics in art. The functions of painter, sculptor and graphic artist are progressively merging in order to realise the synthetic experience of creative art.

The emerging situation in modern Indian painting or rather modern Indian art is now static. Further progress will depend, however, on how much intelligent interest the enlightened section of the Indian public will evince in it, for its development as an art-form with a national identity recognisably Indian.

The Lalit Kala Akademi—the National Academy of Art—has an unavoidable responsibility in shaping the destiny of modern Indian painting. As the supreme national organisation for fostering and promoting the visual and plastic arts, it must exercise a healthy influence in the development of contemporary Indian painting.